

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Do You Love Me? Third Sunday of Easter/C May 5, 2019 Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Rv 5:11-14; **Jn 21:1-19** (Love exists at different levels, and people at different stages of their life are capable of living on different levels of love and giving different levels of love, and they are all good.)

“Do you love me more than these?”

That’s actually an odd question. Does it mean: “do you love me more than you love others?” Or does it mean: “Do you love me more than others love me?” It’s hard to say. But this dialogue I think is important. It’s really the end of the Gospel of John. And St. Augustine points out that often Peter does not represent himself as much as the whole Church. So I believe it is correct to look at this gospel as **a dialogue between the risen Christ and the Church**. It brings up a very touchy subject: **what does the risen Christ really expect from his followers?**

The English does not reflect the Greek, which has two different words for love. **When Jesus says, “Do you love me, Simon Peter?” that word is used in Scripture to refer to the love of God, the love Jesus described when he said, “No greater love has anyone than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** Now Jesus is that one who has laid down his life for his friends. This question is simply: will this love be reciprocated, Peter? again, really addressing the whole Church. **Will this love be reciprocated? Will you lay down your lives for me, for my flock, for my sheep?** And Peter, who was burned if you remember with his boastfulness, who told Jesus he would die with him, but then ran away, Peter says, “You know I love you.” But it’s not the same verb. **The word Peter uses refers to affection, admiration, support, but not really the total self-sacrificing love that Jesus was asking him for.**

Now I think that this response of Peter represents the truth of almost all of us. Yes, we love God. Yes, we admire and want to model ourselves on Christ. Yes, we are willing to support our friends and families, but **most of us are not ready right now to die for God**. Maybe, maybe

circumstance will force us to, but we probably aren't really wanting to. So Peter is right. The verb for him is *philose*. So in the story, in the dialogue as the evangelist gives it to us, Jesus asked his same question again with the same answer. But **the third time he asks, he uses Peter's word. I think this is very significant because all love is good**, and love exists at different levels, and people at different stages of their life are capable of living on different levels of love and giving different levels of love, and they are all good.

This dialogue seems to be saying that **the risen Christ is accepting his fledgling Church in its brokenness and whatever it can do in faith to continue the gospel, to continue the work that he began: caring, supporting, listening, feeding, guiding, encouraging, all these ways are fine**. They are not the greatest kind of love, but they are all important. And certainly there isn't anyone who cannot contribute something to the feeding of Jesus' lambs and the guiding of Jesus' flock. **Although the Church of Christ is a Church of martyrs**, and there have been many in its history, incidentally more in the twentieth century than any other, who have paid the ultimate price of self-outpouring love, laying down their lives in witness to Christ, **even so it is also a Church of ordinary care, ordinary concern, not only for one's own flock but also for God's**.